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Penn State to debate removing Schultz's name from campus building

On a cool September day almost exactly a year ago, Pennsylvania State University administrators, supporters, and friends gathered to dedicate a new day-care center named for a beloved vice president, Gary Schultz.

On Friday, the board of trustees will gather for a far less pleasant discussion: Whether to remove Schultz's name from the building as he faces trial in January on perjury charges stemming from the Jerry Sandusky child sex-abuse case.

For 10 months, Penn State officials and backers have been vigorously scrubbing the school and its environs of tributes to the men caught up in the scandal, setting off a bitter debate over core issues of fairness, honor, and memory.

"It's a complete disregard for due process," Maribeth Roman Schmidt, a spokeswoman for Penn Staters for Responsible Stewardship, said of the proposal to remove Schultz's name. "The man hasn't even seen the inside of a courtroom yet. . . . It seems to fall in line with their 'move on at all costs' philosophy."

Board of trustees spokesman David La Torre declined to answer questions about the removal of Schultz's name. He issued a statement saying that, "in the interests of the families and the greater public," the board would consider changing the name to the Child Care Center at Hort Woods.

However, Schultz attorney Thomas Farrell has asked the board to hold off, "both for the sake of Penn State and in adherence to the American tradition of presuming citizens innocent until and unless proven guilty after a fair trial," according to a letter obtained by the Centre Daily Times.

Efforts by The Inquirer to contact Farrell were unsuccessful.

On the university website, the center already uses the new name.

"Building names and statues are symbolic of achievement and philanthropy. Gary Schultz exemplifies neither, and in my view, his name should be removed," said Thomas Kline, a Philadelphia lawyer who represented the man identified as Victim 5 at Sandusky's trial. "This is especially obvious for a day-care center."

Debates over the removal of honorifics "are constructive and important," Kline said in an e-mail. "And I am quite certain are welcome by the Sandusky victims - those who were harmed the most by the failures of the former Penn State leaders."

Some see the university making a sincere effort to recognize the damage by removing some tributes to those accused as Sandusky enablers, including revered football coach Joe Paterno, who died in January.

"I think Penn State is trying to do the right thing in terms of being sensitive to survivors' issues," said Howard Fradkin, a board member of Male Survivor, a New York group that closely follows the Sandusky case. "[It's] a way of saying to all survivors, 'We believe you. We believe what was done to you was wrong, and we want you to understand that we get that.' "

It's also a way for the university to separate itself from the scandal, said Laura Otten, director of the Nonprofit Center at La Salle University.

"It is a path for disassociation - 'That was then. This is now,' " she said. "A way of distancing themselves, of saying, 'We really are a good, ethical organization, and that [scandal] was an aberration.' "

Paterno and former university President Graham B. Spanier were fired shortly after Sandusky was indicted in November. Schultz, whose duties included overseeing campus police, and athletic director Tim Curley were charged with perjury and failing to report suspected abuse.

Prosecutors say the two failed to notify authorities after then-graduate assistant coach Mike McQueary told them in 2001 he had walked in on Sandusky, a former assistant football coach, molesting a boy in a locker-room shower.

Curley and Schultz maintain their innocence.

The university-commissioned inquiry by former FBI Director Louis Freeh concluded that Paterno, Spanier, Curley, and Schultz failed to act because they feared negative publicity.

Sandusky was convicted in June of 45 counts of child sex abuse and is in jail awaiting sentencing.

In July, workers in hard hats took down the Beaver Stadium statue of Paterno. The student group that manages the football-weekend enclave known as "Paternoville" changed the name to "Nittanyville." An artist erased the halo over Paterno's head on a mural near campus. Last month, owners of the Tavern restaurant in State College tore out a commemorative brick that had been engraved for Sandusky. Nearby was one inscribed "The Curley Family."

Paterno's name remains on the Pattee-Paterno Library for which he and his wife, Sue, donated and raised millions. And Sue Paterno, her children, and grandchildren recently helped dedicate a campus Catholic center named in her honor.

The day-care center is a striking, cantilevered, brick-and-glass building that looks like it could have been designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Set at the corner of Park Avenue and Allen Road, it serves as many as 170 children, providing 15 classrooms, a secure outdoor play area, and a library.

At the Sept. 23 dedication, Schultz sat proudly beside his wife, Karen, surrounded by more than four dozen friends and colleagues. Spanier reminisced to the crowd about when his own children attended day care at the university.

"The name change will only get them halfway there, at best," said Vincent Feldman, a Philadelphia photographer who specializes in portraits of buildings that are in decline or about to disappear. "Visual-memory triggers are strong and long lasting."

People tend to call buildings by their original names, he said. Philadelphians often refer to the Center City Macy's store as Wanamaker's, and to Arcadia University as Beaver College.

The board of trustees meets at 1:30 p.m. Friday in the Nittany Lion Inn. The agenda includes an update on implementing the Freeh report recommendations.

Members of Penn Staters for Responsible Stewardship plan to attend. On Thursday, the group issued a report that itemized what it said were gross failures and inaccuracies in the Freeh Report.

Instead of blaming Spanier, Paterno, Curley, and Schultz, the report said the inquiry should have focused on how state and local child-care and law enforcement professionals failed to stop Sandusky, despite getting word of allegations as early as 1998.

"What the board has demonstrated in the last nine months is that their policy is to bow to public pressure," Schmidt said. "The only person who has seen the inside of the courtroom in this whole fiasco is Sandusky - and he's where he should be. Why other individuals are not being afforded the same process is astounding."